

"Hup!"

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SIGNORINA TOTTINI was afraid—and the tiger knew it. But she was not afraid of the tiger: she was afraid of Bill.

As she tripped into the arena to the throbbing roll of the kettledrums, and stood gaily bowing and saluting smartly with her whip,—a natty figure in frogged military coat, scarlet tights, and high varnished boots,—she had been for an instant vaguely aware of the familiar sight—the shabby folk crowding the tent outside the bars, the gray-brown billows of the ancient canvas top, the vivid blue of the tent-poles, the hissing arc-lights, the faded uniforms of the blasé band; of the familiar animal scent, half beast, half human; and even, above the blare of the brass, of that indescribable pandemonium of illogical sounds that meant a good night at the amusement park.

Then of a sudden her senses focused sharply, as with a shock her eyes locked glances with Bill's. For there he sat, down yonder on a hard bench in the center of the third row, large as life and glowing like a thunder-cloud.

Under her make-up she felt the color surge. If only the Hessian boots would rise to her ears, or the abbreviated scarlet coat stretch down to her toes!

Then the signal sounded, the clanking cage door grated aside, the band struck up the swift measures of the Horse Trot, and his Majesty the tiger came slinking in.

OF course the tiger knew nothing of Bill, and cared less; and yet, without raising his evil eyes higher than the shiny Hessian boots, he was aware of something awry. The boots were not taking their accustomed firm base for the little figure in scarlet. Some accent of imperious control was wanting from the stamp of the Signorina's small foot, some bite from the crack of her whip.

"Hup!" ordered the Signorina, tapping a perch on the side of the cage.

The tiger snarled.

"Hup!" The whip crackling viciously round his ears enforced the command. Habit was strong. The tiger's muscles gathered for the spring. "Hup! Hup!"—with the old peculiar lift in the voice. This time Rajah leaped.

The Signorina stroked his great striped paws testingly with the butt of her whip. Then for an instant she posed, the whip held across her knee, under the splendid beast's perch.

Rajah yawned in regal indifference. Nobody noticed a light of sinister interest that flared for a moment in his sullen eyes as he looked down on the girlish figure beneath him. Nobody, that is, except Bill.

For Bill was doing mental acrobatics—trying desperately to reconcile the little scarlet tiger-tamer with Annie Mullin, the prettiest waitress at the Lightning Lunch. His mind had flown back to an evening, three years before, when Annie had told him it was all off between them.

"Say, Billy," she had said, dropping the black fringes over those light gray Irish eyes, as she nervously polished the counter and rearranged the plates of pie, "you know that swell thirteen-dollar flat you was showin' me over last Sunday out to Roxbury? Well, don't take no lease of that—not on my account. I'm—I'm not t'inkin' of gettin' married as much as I

was. I like you fine, Bill, but I guess it's in my blood. I ain't never told you, but my mother was in the business with a circus, workin' a bunch of performin' lions. Say! she had Bonavita chased clear under the table! The show people that comes here to feed have been after me this long while. They say I've the trick with animals, and I guess I have, all right, all right. They want to put me on with a trained tiger. I was round to the arenar again las' night after the show. Rajah's gettin' used to me. I've been in the cage twice already, an' he acted fine! I'm real sorry, Bill. But I guess marryin's too slow for me. I've got to have somethin' that takes nerve."

And Bill, in his helpless pain and anger, had only wanted to hurt her as she was hurting him.

"Nerve!" he had jeered savagely. "Aw, fade away! Them show animals are all doped. You have to punch 'em to make 'em roar. You think you want to show yer nerve. 'Tain't nerve yer so crazy t' show—it's yer shape! What if yer mother was a show-woman? You can be respectable!"

And then Annie's eyes blazing as only Irish eyes can, and Annie's voice with an edge on it: "You—you—lobster! I wouldn't marry you now,—not if I had to sweep the street!"

HE had not seen her from that day to this. And here she was, "showing her shape" at the biggest show on the beach. It was hard to tell which looked uglier, Bill or the tiger.

Uglier, that is, in spirit. The tiger was clearly the handsomer animal. When Bill cooled down enough to take note of the proceedings in the arena once more, Rajah was being made to do spectacular stunts on the back of a superb milk-white Arabian charger. And a sight it was to see the lithe, tawny-striped creature leap through tinselled hoops and bound on to high perches at the compelling word of a slender girl in scarlet.

Bill felt an odd pain somewhere about the heart as he watched, noting involuntarily how her girlish softness, the appealing curves of cheek and chin, the piquant lines of the profile, triumphed over the hardening mask of her make-up. He felt a great need to summon wrath and scorn to the defense of his manly fortitude.

Although a heavy wooden saddle, almost a platform, protected the horse's back from the claws of the great cat, and his neck and ears were armored with a singular spiked harness, the sensitive animal shivered all over every time the tiger dropped down upon him, his pink nostrils widening with fear.

"Huh!" growled Bill, addressing the man on his right. "What's that fool horse shakin' about? There's nothin' to be afraid of. That tiger's doped!"

"Doped, is he?" the man almost shouted, turning on Bill.

Then he seemed to think better of his violence, and fell to studying Bill as if he were a strange animal, narrowing his eyes offensively.

"I suppose, now," he said in Bill's ear, "you know all about tiger-taming. In the business yourself?"

Bill missed the heavy sarcasm. He didn't look at the man, or even in the uncertain light he might have made out the frogged military coat and knee-boots, and the whip, held furled, so to speak, in the powerful hands.

"Well, no," Bill replied simply. "I'm a telephone lineman. But I ain't easy kidded. If them show animals was real dangerous, there'd be a roof to that there arenar!"

He pointed triumphantly to the top of the performing-cage, where the great bars

were bent downward and inward in a circle of murderous prongs.

The man seemed hugely entertained.

"Well, you know, a tiger isn't a—telephone lineman," he chuckled. "He can't shinny up a perpendicular iron rod, nor he can't jump in the teeth o' those prongs, neither."

ABURST of applause interrupted them.

The little trainer having brought the horse episode to a close with a flourish and a pose that openly begged for hands, the cage door slid aside to let the nervous steed escape, his hoofs echoing on the boards of the passage.

And now Rajah rested majestically on a pedestal at the back of the arena, watching with those smoldering eyes of his the preparations for his final act.

As stage "supes" passed them to her through the bars, the Signorina skipped about, arranging the parts of a long inclined plane up which Rajah was scheduled to propel himself, balanced on a big ball. If there was one thing more than another that Rajah objected to, it was waltzing on a ball.

"Say, what's got into the kid?" Bill heard his neighbor muttering. "She's flustered. That's the third time she's had to move her props!"

It was Bill's turn then to take a good look at the man at his elbow; and now, by the reflected glow from the stage, he easily discerned the keeper's togs.

The man met his abashed glance indugently.

"Yes, that's my tiger. I broke him in. The kid, there, only works him. You see, the public likes to watch a girl fooling

breath, she rolled the great ball to the center of the arena, tapped it commandingly with her whip, stepped to one side, and dared the tiger to leap.

As usual, Rajah took a deal of daring. The Signorina's foot and the Signorina's whip executed a perfect fusillade of crackling and stamping before the great beast could be nerved to his work.

Then the graceful leap, the flash of black and yellow, the splendid curve of the lithe body through the air.

Miss Mullin had got well into her stride now. As Rajah leaped, she was conscious of a thrill of pride that Bill should be there to see how easily her will dominated the great, powerful brute. Show her shape, indeed! She guessed he'd see some nerve, too, before she was done with him.

Not too fast, Signorina!

Was Rajah, too, indulging in vain-glorious, underestimating the difficulty of his time-honored best trick?

His marvelous cat's muscles braced to land elastically, all four paws bunched together on the curving surface of the sphere, Rajah missed his aim by an inch. His fore paws, indeed, reached the ball. His hind paws struck the stage with a force that jarred every nerve in his body.

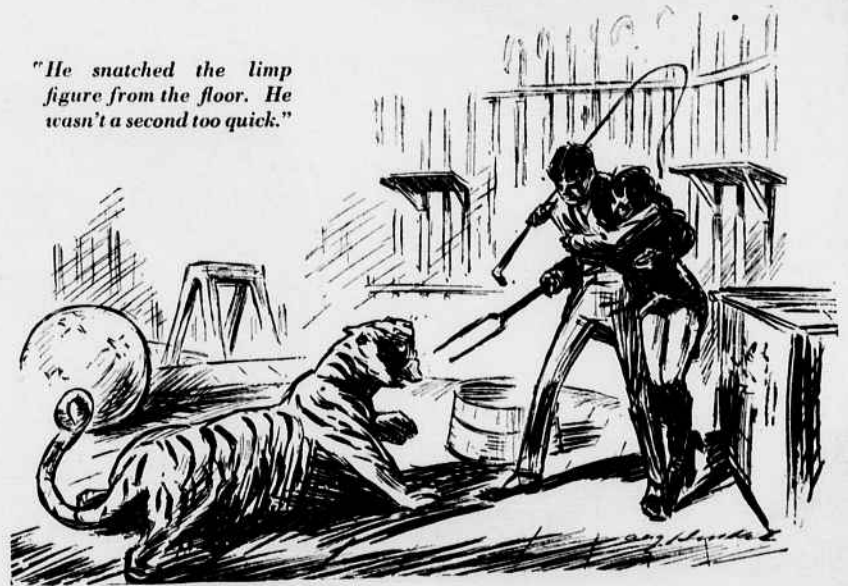
Then Rajah was mad! Spurning the ball violently from him, lashing his strong tail in short, angry twitches, his ugly jaws set in a snarl, he turned to wreak his temper on his trainer.

"Look out!" came in a thrilling undertone from the lips of the man at Bill's elbow. The keeper strained forward as if to project his authority inside the cage. Bill's heart hopped up into his mouth.

BUT at the first sign of active insurrection a change passed over the Signorina with the whip. She seemed to add inches to her stature, to be possessed of an invincible and dangerous calm. Her eyes opened wide and glowed with a strange fire. Her whip no longer cracked. When the lash flew out now, it sought and found, not empty air, but the tiger.

"H-up!" she ordered, tapping a pedestal, her voice low, with plenty of "punch"

"He snatched the limp figure from the floor. He wasn't a second too quick."



with a brute like that. But you're wrong about tigers, Mister. This ain't no pussy-pussy business. I can snuggle up to Rajah when he's feelin' right; but then again—there's some of his work!"

He stretched out his left hand. Even in the dimness, Bill, bending over it, saw the twisted purple scar that seamed its back from thumb to forefinger. His wincing look traveled from the wound to the smooth cheek of Signorina Annie Mullin, at that moment playfully admonishing Rajah with lifted forefinger to sit up and be a good little tiger and do his best.

SHE was ready, now, for the climax of the act. The band, which had been drizzling indifferent melodies, as if tunelessly snoring in its sleep, woke up and began to shake out thrills.

The Signorina drove Rajah to a perch high up on the side of the cage; and then, while the band dramatically held its

in it. Rajah, long used to respond to the mastery in that voice, half turned to obey, then wheeled again, snarling.

The girl shifted the whip, menacing the rebellious beast with the heavy butt. He cringed, but struck savagely at the descending weapon. The girl advanced on him fearlessly, stamping her foot. The beast gave ground, half cowed before the authority that seemed to radiate from every line of the slight figure. Still he made no move toward the pedestal.

Driven back by blows and obloquy, the tiger, in his fury of rage and pain, dashed against a hurdle supporting the inclined plane, bringing down the frame.

The accident might have quelled Rajah—did, for the moment, send him sprawling with a sharp sting in a bruised shoulder. But the debris, falling between him and the indomitable little trainer, afforded him a temporary shelter from her whip.

Well now for Annie Mullin had her